

The IHRIS Podcast – Coaching & Resilience

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KW: Hello, and welcome to another in the series of IHRIS podcasts. Today, I'm delighted to be joined by Fiona Goût, who is an independent coach and we are going to talk through coaching and resilience and how important that's certainly becoming in the world of business nowadays.

Fiona, thank you ever so much for joining me. Do you want to give the listeners a little more introduction around you and what you do in that space?

FG: Thank you very much Katherine. It's lovely to be here today.

So, I'm a leadership and career coach. I work for my business which is called Coaching Horizons. I coach people on a whole variety of things. I work with organisations, and I work with individuals direct, coaching them on leadership challenges or career coaching them when they're at career crossroads.

I feel really fortunate working in that space of coaching. I believe it's such a powerful tool to help people channel their talents and energy and positively move forward when they're faced with a difficult challenge, or maybe a change they want to make, or a mindset they want to overcome. And I've also got a really big passion for resilience and wellbeing.

KW: And I guess, with the recent pandemic, the whole concept around resilience has become a lot more important for people, hasn't it? Are you noticing that with some of your clients? How they're actually managing to deal with maintaining their resilience through this pandemic.

FG: Yes, I think, definitely. It's a really challenging time for everyone, isn't it? There are things which, in a way, feel like they're possibly easier, in that we don't have, perhaps, the usual commute to work and therefore, there's less pressure in that way. But, I think, the challenge we've got now is lines are becoming quite blurred in terms of our home lives and our work lives and it's quite hard to carve out that time in the right proportions. So, I think it is, yeah, it is a really challenging time for all, so it definitely impacts our resilience.

KW: So, talking to clients and engaging with them, to coach them through all this, what's your approach? How do you, sort of, almost open up that conversation to people around the support you can give them?

FG: So, when I'm coaching people, whether it's specifically on developing their resilience or it's a wider goal, I really believe in coaching the whole person. So, usually when you're working with someone it's important to get that wider view of what's going on in their whole lives. And then, the focus is more – really it's giving them space to explore and see what's working for them and what's not working for them. And giving them the opportunity to, if they want to go there, to think about some things that they might want to change or enhance and equipping them with some tools, potentially, to try that out.

KW: Yeah, that's a good way of putting it actually, isn't it? I suppose when you're giving them the tools, you're equipping them to, almost, build their confidence, their optimism, and I guess, that flows through naturally then to their resilient outlook to work and you know, their whole life, as it were.

FG: Yeah, definitely. I mean optimism, as you say, it's an interesting one, isn't it? Because, I mean, yes, while we are slightly pre-disposed to be more optimistic or less optimistic, you can actually develop the skill of optimism. So, we look at exploring what, kind of, is their narrative, I guess, in their life. And then, if they have a more pessimistic one, we work out some different frameworks of approaching things, to help them look at things in that more realistic optimistic sense, which can then just help us, I think, especially at this sort of time, look forward in a more realistic way to the future. It can give us that sense of agency and power back - that there are things in our lives that we can control and work within.

KW: Yeah, that's very true actually and I guess something I see, certainly from the HR perspective, when I'm talking to clients, is how can they get their teams bouncing back? How can they, sort of, reflect on the experience that they've had over the last, what, eighteen months or so, with these various lockdowns? Which I guess is critical, not only in their personal life, in their work life but also if they're going through changes at work, be it promotions, working through succession plans to see where they can go in their career. I guess that all definitely comes back to it – building that bounce back for them.

FG: Yeah, I think it's bounce back and there's also an element of growth. So, it's about bouncing back but it's also about learning from the challenges that we've experienced and growing in light of them. I think, when working with ourselves, a big part of our approach at the moment is just being a bit more compassionate with ourselves about what's going on. And then, just taking those moments to stop, reflect and have a bit more of a - take a bit more of a purposeful focus on where you're going to go looking forward. There's no one size fits all in terms of resilience. There's various things, obviously, we work on in terms of wellbeing strategies or developing our own resilience but how we all are is unique to ourselves and that's why that one on one space is really useful in exploring how resilience shows up for us.

KW: So, I guess that that - I mean, I can understand a lot of what you're saying when I'm looking at my clients and the kind of things they're looking at. You're almost saying, if people look - you know, explore your feelings, look at your frustrations, how you're dealing with a difficult situation. But then your role is helping them identify and understand and cope with the almost physical symptoms, is it? Of stress and anxiety. Or would you, sort of, phrase it in a different way?

FG: I think you're right in terms of a big part of it is stopping, taking a moment, recognising how you're feeling, acknowledging that it's okay to feel that way and it's totally normal to feel that way. And also, recognising that a lot of the thoughts we're having are just that, they are just thoughts. And then, it's taking that purposeful action to then move forward. So, it can be around the physical, in that stress does affect us physically and it's also just though, around thinking about, really, what habits work for us, which habits don't work for us. Have we got into a cycle where we're, almost, sabotaging our own way of moving forward? And just, maybe raising awareness of those things so that we then can make a choice as to what we want to do, to then get a different result moving forward.

KW: Fiona, giving the listeners a bit more of an idea around the tools that you use as a practitioner, what are your, sort of, go to ones? What are the ones that you're pulling off the shelf, the ones that you find most useful?

FG: So, one that I would use for resilience. I use a psychometric questionnaire; it's called the resilience questionnaire by PSI and it's scientifically well backed up. The information it gives us is - it's not really the tool itself it's more the discussion afterwards. So, it's useful at the beginning, perhaps, of a coaching relationship, to do something like that. Looking at the eight components of resilience that they've outlined. As a result, it identifies the areas where they're doing really well on - so, you can, kind of, celebrate where you're already strong - the areas you might want to build on and then the areas that - there might be some that you identify as ones that you want to develop further.

And there's loads of other tools that I would just naturally use, depending on the situation that you're coaching within. So, for example, maybe it's on confidence, like our confidence gremlins. So, I might use an exercise to help us almost create, like a little persona of our confidence voice inside our heads and how we can, sort of, acknowledge that little voice but then politely ask it to leave the room, so we can carry on moving forward with ourselves. So, there's lots of different ways of introducing things as you do the coaching but obviously, it would depend on where that coaching relationship goes as to which are appropriate to draw on.

KW: I really like that, the word you gave there was our little gremlins but then also being able to celebrate areas of, sort of, the eight points that you touched on. Where things have gone well, where things have worked well, and being able to celebrate those. Because I think, I guess, we can almost become super critical, that we see this as a tick box exercise, you know, you've got to give constructive feedback but actually there's a positive spin to it. Look what has worked, look what you've done really well. Build on that and then, maybe tweak some of the areas that, you know, have probably knocked your confidence.

FG: Yeah, I think, definitely. I'm a big believer that you play to your strengths. So, we are so much more productive and so much more engaged when we're focussing on areas of strength. So, I think, is it 80% of our time? I would say, you're focussing on your strengths because that is the stuff that's going to breed the success. So, the more we can - and just in general, how we work with each other - the more we can focus on strengths, play to strengths, as opposed to the areas that we struggle with, the more engaged we are at work. And similarly, when you're developing yourself, the more aware you are of all the amazing things, because, I think, we all play down. So, our brains have this wonderful negativity bias. It came from, sort of, that cave man time when we were looking always for the negative and that's where we focus. And there's various things we can do to almost retrain the way we look at things; to instead of scan for the negative, scan for the positive. And that is so powerful, especially on a wellbeing front, but also just on a happy life perspective.

KW: Yeah, I think certainly over the last eighteen months there's been a lot of negativity and trying to, almost, see through that fog is pretty essential.

Giving some thought around when people are wanting to engage in this for their teams, what's the recommended style and approach to those coaching sessions, that you've seen most beneficial to staff engaging in resilience coaching?

FG: So, I think on coaching, every organisation might have a different requirement but what I tend to find works - because I used to be an internal coach as well as an external coach - is beginning with a conversation at the beginning to understand what the goal is. So, what's the purpose of the coaching? So, within an organisation, I would usually have a three-way conversation at the beginning - once I've established chemistry with the individual I'm coaching - a three-way conversation with the sponsor, so potentially the line manager, and the coachee, to understand exactly what the coaching goal is. What they're trying to get out of it? What are the measurable things that we can then see whether or not we've achieved that at the end? But also, establishing that the coaching relationship is confidential then between me and the person I'm coaching.

So, after that, sort of agreeing the - I call it the contract but agreeing essentially how it all works - it's then working with the individual, usually, it might be around, six, ninety-minute sessions but how long it is will completely depend on the need. And halfway through, I would usually do a check-in, just to see how we're

progressing towards that goal. I'd ideally encourage the coachee to do that with the line manager as well, so I'm not feeding back, because it's a confidential space, what's going on with the coaching relationship. And then, at the end of the coaching sessions, then it's sort of bringing it all together, again celebrating what we've done, the successes, and thinking about how they can sustain that improvement going forward.

KW: Fiona, we've talked a lot in today's session about resilience but I'm mindful that there's quite a big area of what you do which is solely around coaching, isn't there? What's your main thread, you're main thinking around the benefits of coaching and people engaging in that concept for their staff?

FG: So, I think in terms of benefits, it comes back to providing your people with that, sort of space, confidential coaching space, to explore the key things that are important to them. So, the sort of things I quite often go into organisation to coach on might be, you've got an individual who wants to go for promotion, or you've got someone who's just taken on a new leadership role, or it might be something to do with people going – I do some coaching for people going on parental leave, maternity leave.

So, during those times, taking the promotion one for example - you know, it's a really challenging time, isn't it? When you're going for promotion. And there's a lot of thoughts going on in your head, but the power of the coaching is that you give the person that opportunity to have that dedicated space, to explore what is important for them in this thing that they're going for, that they're really keen on and they really want to get there but they're also a little bit nervous. So, they have that safe space to explore thoughts, explore options, as to how they might get there. Maybe identify the steps to get there, such as developing a business case, exploring what that might look like, developing sponsorship and buy in from the business or again, working on some of the confidence or mindset challenges that might be standing in their way.

So, coaching, I find, can be really beneficial because the individual and coach can keep in mind the overarching goal, can explore the other things around it, that are of importance, in order to achieve it. As a result of the coaching, hopefully, the individual has that renewed, refreshed focus on where they're going with things and has that opportunity to practice in that sort of space, things that are concerning them, so that then they can come back out of that coaching into the promotion process, or what ever it might be, and have a, sort of, targeted approach which they can then own and move forward.

KW: That's very true actually Fiona and you'll probably have seen this a lot from your background because you worked in the City, haven't you? You've come from law firms; you've come from real estate. What other areas have you, you know, seen this working in?

FG: So, I started off my career in commercial property. I used to run graduate programs, back in the day, in commercial property firms but my backgrounds predominantly in HR. So, I worked in law firms, I worked in a lot of professional services organisations, and I've worked as an internal coach for about seven or eight years. And now I work with a whole variety of different organisations. I think, coaching itself, it's not about knowing the topic of the person. It's useful knowing the context, in that it helps you understand, sort of, the right questions perhaps, to ask, but having that – as a coach you come in completely unbiased anyway so, that's not as important. But I do understand the corporate challenges people have. It's an interesting world to try and navigate, isn't it?

KW: I think you're right Fiona, it is a very interesting and sometimes complex and scary area that we're in.

If people are wanting to get hold of you, we'll obviously have details on our IHRS webpage but how else can people get hold of you, if they want to carry this conversation forward and, you know, look to get your support on coaching?

FG: Just get in touch for a chat really. So, you can find me on LinkedIn. So, Fiona Gout. My surname's a funny one, it's spelt G O U T; it's a French name. Or drop me an email, Fiona Gout at coaching horizons dot co dot UK and just get in touch for a chat and we can explore what you need support on or if you just want to bounce ideas about coaching. It's a passion of mine, so I'm always willing to just chat to people about it.

KW: Great, thank you very much Fiona. We really appreciate you taking time out of your busy day today to talk through the coaching and resilience side. So, thank you very much.

As ever, please tune into our next podcast. Many thanks.

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